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Papery Graveyards - Sense and Silence with archives.

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Introduction

Archives are often assumed to be the domain of historians. Despite their materiality, they are also largely imaginary assemblages that require active engagements with both materials and bodies. There is a growing body of research in the social sciences which is questioning how we might use archives differently and how we might reuse data (Valles, Corti, Tamboukou, Baer, 2011). The Archive Project (2016) and Maria Tamboukou (2012, 2011) have richly explored how our own entanglements and experimentations can importantly reconfigure knowledge and interpretations in archival spaces. This article seeks to explore the problematics around our changing relations with archival materials at a time when the very idea of an archive is under rapid change with technological advances and a desire for paperless environments. And yet already this claim is revealing a tinge of nostalgia and must therefore be examined before proceeding. There has also been criticism of using reflexivity with archival work with charges of circularity and upholding sameness (Haraway 1997). However this article challenges the notion that reflexive approaches are circular and proposes an iterative movement as well as a critical engagement with difference. It seeks to contribute to the existing archival research and add to research where there has been enormous effort to avoid positions that seek to privilege overpowering presence, the upholding and preserving of hierarchies/structures and claims of independent realities. (Pearce, Patterson and Rushton., 2014., Pearce, Kidd, Patterson, Hanley, 2012., Pearce, Maclure 2009, Stronach, Garratt, Pearce and Piper 2007)

Archives are places that produce as much as record. Understanding how research processes might work in such contexts and what it might mean to read the tones and silences, experience the sense making strategies and tropes, and attempt to rite (write) differently are important aspirations of this article. It is research that gathers its data through fleeting moments, casual asides, footnotes and active re readings in searching how we might deploy an educational imagination in inventive ways.

What gets recorded and remembered is the mainstay of any archive but just as hives themselves have comings and goings that structure their existence, so too may any archive be open to such ac-

tivities. Where do meanings get housed? and What keeps them there? What kind of cross pollinations of ideas have happened, or might happen? What identifies our ‘beingness’ with other relations? [no pun intended] and how might we be concerned with what passes, as well as what remains? To ask such questions is to critically explore our changing relations as individuals in a society; between past and future; between what exists and what might be.

Archives and Education

Making sense of material that has already been catalogued, reading the tones and silences of documents and adopting a philosophical reflexive approach enables new insights and meanings to be arrived at. The archival work for this article took place over a two year period in the Coop archives in Central Manchester, UK. The National Cooperative Archive houses records relating to the history of the worldwide cooperative movement. The collection includes rare books, periodicals, manuscripts, films, photographs and oral histories from the initial ideas of the eighteenth century to the present day.

“What has that kind of education got to do with grocery and laundry” appeared in Handbook of Cooperative educationalists as various disagreements were articulated about what kind of education should be offered. It felt uncomfortable even though I could rationalise the date as 1930’s, the tone was striking and immediate. It was peculiarly familiar and personified although there was no face or name or image. And yet alongside such disruptions there were also startling illuminations. For example, in writing how Easter schools and Saturday schools should be organised, they were described in terms of *“the movement of the sea - predictable but not self determined”* and that it required *“constant movement and foresight to determine the course it will take”* or that education was like a *“bounce on a billiard table - unintended and largely unpredictable”* and *“in a real sense the business of the cooperative movement is education.”* Such poetic phrasings and comments both touched and were at a distance in ways that shook me and hooked me in. Minutes of

meetings from various Education Committees were often written colloquially, with humour, and it felt as though the conversation was live, recorded and you were in the room with them. To say that there are hauntings sounds melodramatic but in a philosophical sense they are hauntings and at the same time, con[signments], as if their voices were already saying: ask questions, see possibilities, seek connections - avoid pre packaged imagery, automatic answers or runway lights - above all be playful with us. I attempted to read down to the fundamentals and up to the abstractions in an effort to probe these encounters further.

All texts are selective, diversionary and amnesia prone, forgetting and repressing crucial things about their own origins and those of the events with which they deal. (Strohm 1998, p xii).

The author's doctoral thesis (Pearce 2007) explored a continually recomposing relation between universalism and particularism in light of critical theorists such as Barthes, Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard. For some, at that time, such changes in the way history could be worked with was tantamount to heresy in archival terms (e.g. Elton 1991) but there has now at least been an acceptance that writing history 'as it really was' is no longer possible and actually never was. In educational terms, this has been a good thing in that there is an acknowledgement that our relationship with the past is one which is constantly mediated by limitations and uncertainties with the texts that survive. Indeed any investigation of the past is itself an exploration of these very uncertainties and ambiguities and it is in this spirit of inquiry that this article proceeds. The aim is to explore questions and issues of sense making and silences. Drawing upon Marc Auge's thinking about the double movement of universalisation and particularisation as well as the potential for reflexivity to go beyond displacement of the same, I suggest that reflexivity is fully capable of negotiating the change which is continuously recomposing relations. Furthermore it is reflexivity which is capable of concretising itself, exemplifying, realising and of how sense and silences might be arrived at. There is still a great deal to be said about how experience and words relate to each other.

In order to arrive at the problematics which are at stake here, it is important and necessary to first take a detour through some central tenets which are associated with the very idea of an archive.

As Foucault noted, archives are interesting in that they bind us to our social and cultural worlds. He suggests that every society has special places which he terms '*heterotopias*' and which are themselves markers of social and cultural identities. It could also be argued that archives are anthropocentric in nature, denoting metaphors and imaginaries of 'field' 'mastery' and 'territory'. They are markers of property and yet they inhabit a world which does not belong to any specific time.

Craven (2008) notes that questions of 'how' are central to a lot of archival research whilst questions of 'why' have been relatively neglected. Exploring why archives matter, what role they have within our lives have been substantially addressed by researchers such as Crane (2011) and Vergo (1989). This article seeks to conduct educational research whereby questions of engagement and insights become crucial in exploring both how and why archives might be worked with. Education is, amongst other things, about developing practices in the generation of new knowledge, values and meanings. The task is always to release new potentiality and there are always gaps in time.

The distinction between 'world' rather than specific 'site' can be attributed to Marc Auge. In *An Anthropology for Contemporaneous Worlds* (1994) he made a strong and convincing case for research to reconsider its metaphors of 'field' and 'site' and all the connotations which are associated with static and specific markers of social study. Such a shift requires a radical rethink of the terms of engagement as well a change in why we might embark on research in the first instance.

Thinking itself is becoming more complex because it is confronting a reality that cannot be grasped by simple instruments (Auge, 1994, p52)

In invoking a 'world' rather than a specific site, Auge argues that there is an acknowledgement that experience has to traverse across different domains and cannot be reduced to a specific site. Experience is necessarily heterogeneous and diverse. It necessarily leads us to the world in its entirety and we are bound up with its contemporaneous nature. As with an archive, we need to be concerned with the paradoxical nature of for example decomposition and expansion; dimensions of individuality and multiplicity; temporal and spatial; politics and ritual in the creation of meaning and the destruction of other meanings. In other words, the makings of sense and silence.

It is also important to acknowledge that any research involving archives in the current climate is also dealing with an unprecedented growth in both electronic and paper records; freedom of information and data protection; institutional crises and compliance issues; staff scarcity in archives; scarce 'heritage' funding and the problematics and politics of trying to keeping public spaces open.

Nothing is more troubling today than the concept archived in this word archive. (Derrida, 1995, p57)

In *Archive Fever* (1995), Derrida exposes the simultaneous duality that is at work in any archive. Invoking the Greek term, *Arkhe*, he notes the duality which implies both a *commencement* and a *commandment*. The notion of commencing draws upon ontological principles (nature and history) whereas commandment invokes nomological principles (law, social order and authority). Archives house meanings and in one sense such housing can be seen as place: domicile, family, lineage, institution. They can also be considered as site: a place from which order is given. Yet if we are to heed Auge's urge to consider 'world' rather than 'site' in an attempt to avoid the catastrophic failures that accompany claims of discovering any independent reality or metaphysical truth then a study of archives might necessarily involve an inquiry into *eco-nomic* forces too - the archive is not simply accumulation and capitalisation of memory; it produces as much as it records.

There can be no archive without *eco-nomic* forces, without repetition and without a certain exterior. Much of Derrida's work is concerned with the integrity of naming practices, of intellectual assumptions, of political goals and ethical intentions. His philosophical approach critically examines and dissects concepts of decision making and brings us to a place where knowledge is radically uncertain and where accountability and responsibility necessarily needs to be rethought. He makes enormous effort to avoid falling back on metaphysics where repositories of naming and meanings are exhaustive and unproblematically correspond with objects, events and phenomena in the world. His work could be said to be the very antithesis of archival efforts and yet his continued explorations for the status of writing as well as the social and cultural role of memory and preservation suggest that he too was intrigued with the how and why questions of archival work.

Any archive is more than just an interpretative site. It has tactile sense, emotional sense, imaginary sense, physical and material sense that cannot be ignored. I also draw upon earlier writings on reflexivity (Stronach et al 2007) and how the idea of signature might be invoked again in archival work.

There is no archive without a place of consignment, without a technique of repetition and without a certain exteriority (Derrida 1995, p14)

Digging Paper Graves: Creating the Space

This section of the paper explores the ways in which repetition performs archontic functions whilst also being mindful of what such assertions necessarily forget. Each repetition reproduces but each reproduction is unique in the way that a signature might be. In this way fixed interpretations are avoided and unavailable whilst readings are simultaneously open to how meanings are being housed

and carried forward. Attention is paid to senses and silences in considering the relationship between author and audience and how reflexivity might be used in reading archival documents.

The author had originally visited the Coop archives in Manchester, UK to explore the educational materials for an undergraduate curriculum course being taught at Manchester Metropolitan University. The author had long since held an interest in archives though, by her own admission, had done so in a rather nostalgic way. As educators, we are fond of keeping materials and reusing in new and productive ways. I was both curious and intrigued to see what the Co-op archives held but was soon detracted from this task as encounters with the archives provoked some serious and unsettling thinking. An excerpt from a research diary writes:

As I dipped into various texts¹, I was curious to know more about why Cooperative societies considered education to be their responsibility? How and in what ways was education being understood? and what could be learned from their endeavours? The immediacy of the archive was striking. Easily accessible with two dedicated staff, I was soon able to read and access the rarest of documents in trying to search and follow through various education committees and their activities. I was initially struck with the exam questions and thought it would be an interesting and provoking task to see if students would work out which questions were contemporary and why or conversely, why not? e.g. To what main causes do you attribute our present unemployment problem? or A Good Cooperator makes a Good Citizen? or What are the contributory factors to the successful maintenance of democratic control? All these questions appeared on an Honours Diploma Course in 1930. [written January 2015]

¹ Texts visited Jan 2015 included: British Cooperation Today (1934) Topham, E (ed), Cooperative Education. A Handbook for Cooperative Educationalists. Cooperative Union Ltd Education Department Session 1929 -30 and 1939-40.

Texts visited April 2015 included: Cooperative Convention Procedure 1956-60, Cooperative Educator Vol IX to XII.

Texts visited Feb 2016 included: Rochdale memorial Lecture 1948 in Coop education. R L Marshall. Education and Politics. Education and progress. J L Paton

Scratching the lid: Materiality and Inscription

In one sense working with archives requires that one surveys materials. These artefacts, papers, documents, books, pamphlets, images, films, recordings have been accumulated with some kind of desire or goal in mind. At the same time, the materiality is also a shapeless mass housed in boxes, on shelves, under furniture, on window ledges and in the rolling units that characterise our imagery of institutional archives. They need forming, to be worked with, to be made sense of, to be looked at, to be read. A traditional view of the archival role is to place us as observers and interpreters of our reality but such a view places us at a distance from this very materiality and separates us from any sense of futurity that it may have.

Groves (2007) writes that in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988, 361), Deleuze and Guattari make a distinction between the ‘architect’ and the ‘artisan’. The ‘architect’ surveys materials and belongs to a royal science in that it tries to impose form from the outside. In contrast, the artisan or nomad science inhabits it. We often think that stating the problem enables us to solve it but Deleuze and Guattari argue that this is to state the problem badly. The very idea of an archive is not enough to understand the problems of archive work - we cannot just survey its materials, study past practices and understand its creation.

The archive has always been a pledge and like every pledge is a token of the future. To put it more trivially: what is no longer archived in the same way is no longer lived in the same way. (Derrida, 1995, p18)

In seeking how to work further with archival matter, I will once again draw upon the work of Deleuze and Guattari in ATP in considering text as grid. This enables a strategy that can cross different domains and registers and enables methodological questions to open up:

What indices are being used for time? What audiences are being imagined? Where is author and narrator located? What tones can be sensed from the documents? Further research questions are also possible: How can silences be worked with? What kind of futures are being imagined? What striking examples can be found? And if such strategies seem a long way from traditional research work with archives, a humble reminder can be found in Twigg's biographical note (1924, p27) in his acknowledgment that "*the available material is, therefore, essentially scrappy in character....*". It is perhaps reasonable to assume that whilst he might have been desiring a 'royal science' of research methods, he also knew in another sense that such an imposition was not possible and he could be said to have inhabited the diversity and plurality of texts and materials he drew upon for his book. His relation was one of responsibility to the objects and materials he was working with and through his sensitivity sought to understand what might emerge.

If the future is real and always already with us, but in virtual form, then our relationship to it is misunderstood if we think of ourselves as colonisers of an empty future ready to be occupied (Groves 2007).

Twigg was aiming for a blueprint but ended his text by acknowledging the 'half forgotten pioneers' and 'stressing the importance of the cooperative association' (1924, p46). Methodologically speaking however, the message has not been the carrier; the carrier is the message. So what repeats? and what is the composition of such repetitions? What is always at work and creating patterns for the future?

A striking feature that runs through many of the texts in the archives in one form or another is the reference to failure. Whole sections and chapters carefully document the reasons why most cooperative schemes failed. The imagery and metaphors which ‘carry’ the expressions of failure shifts and changes in different texts and are worthy of exploring a little further.

“such strenuous lives, forceful characters, splendid schemes and even their noble failures serve as admirable inspirations” (Twigg, 1939, p145)

“struggle harder as it challenges the inner fortresses of capitalism” (Topham 1934, p56)

“ it is necessary to see that every student is instructed in why and how of Co-operation for this is the heart of the movement and a weak heart easily leads to dissolution” (ibid:6)

The imagery suggests that there is nothing inevitable about failure. Battle, strong character and personal will characterise many expressions and articulations. The tone is often determined, direct, instructional but at the same time there is much thought being given to harnessing the power of failure.

Education is necessary. We may fail but we have to try. (Paton 1948, p10).

Throughout these texts, explicit reference is made to ‘forces’ and the realm of silence whereby such forces are known to operate. There is also an acknowledgment that there is no language with which these ‘forces’ can be directly spoken about. The lack of tangibility or measurable indicators does not make these factors any less real or substantial. There appears to be a respectful acknowledgment of their significance in educative processes and contexts.

Many cooperative societies in the UK sought relations with universities and where joint activities were undertaken. University of Manchester, Sheffield, Durham, Leeds, Birmingham, South Wales, Leicester, Nottingham and Oxford all ran pioneer extensions with Cooperative societies in 1873 following the Rochdale Pioneers (1867-1871) lectures. These lectures were undertaken by university colleagues and were reported to have *discovered that these common folk were seeking truth and not the mere theory of things*. (1948, p198) - a rather disparaging and elitist perspective both ontologically speaking and in terms of epistemology. However conventional teaching was often set aside in favour of “The Class” which was described as *a period of conversational teaching enlivened by brisk episodes of heckling (ibid)*. The documents convey real struggles with how to go about such encounters and an unswerving commitment to the value of trying. Engaging with the unknown, trying new approaches, working through the difficulties, studying the failures all characterise educational practices in ways that are so humbling in a contemporary educational climate that seems averse to deviations of practice.

Yuval Harari (2017) notes that humanity often works on the premise that *if something doesn't work, let's go back*. Let's go back to a time when we felt more sure, or more secure and resurrect that approach, that era or those practices. It is less common to confront a problem with future orientated visions. To return to archives to seek reassurance or to look for “old answers to new problems” as Patrick Wright² might put it, is perhaps to miss the very possibilities and potential that archives might have.

How might we choose research foci that will enable us to apprehend the paradoxes that we face? How might we use archives to question what is ahead? How might archives enable ‘each and all of us’ (Auge 1999) as we try to navigate, create and manage our own ways of mediating truth, trust

² Patrick Wright writes in *Living in an Old Country* (1985) of the problems in Trafficking in History

and identity at a time when the social functioning of institutions is radically changing? The cooperative archives are littered with texts and documents that reflect the strong social, moral and political functioning of its work and education was very much at the forefront of these endeavours. Yet the relations between such past and future has to navigate the present we are faced with.

Towards a Theory of Streaming

If archives present themselves as the already written truth of the social and of history then “*the ‘already there’ of power has devoured the ‘not yet’ of utopia*” (Auge 1999, p86). When history is presented as raw or already shaped, Auge argues it is operating as a kind of myth. And yet if we treat archives as materials that must be created in order to make history then it is also operating as a kind of myth. “*Politics has to do with myth precisely because it is ritualised and inscribed in an extended ritual set up*” (ibid :86). These two kinds of myth are linked as they tie meaning together. To the extent that new myths are transformed from old ones (even if they are polarities e.g. a return to tradition or revolutionary strategies that seek to reverse the old terms).

Theories of failure, of the end of Co-operative societies and endeavours , of loss of social meaning of failure of education, of humour and imagination are yet another form of myth doing its work to represent the real and where it is ritual’s role to manage its functioning. “*All these theories, whatever their differences, believe they have buried myth.*” (Auge,1999, p88)

And yet the diversity of themes that are opened up and possible to explore with such failure: death, graveyards, loss, mourning, also point to return, hope, renewal and a continual search for meaning

where we don't know, or can't know, or won't know unless... but just as every theory of failure runs the risk of being blind to what keeps repeating, what succeeds despite and perhaps in spite of, what endures, what persists, Auge considers what it might be to think politics as extension. In other words, to ask what is both upstream and downstream. To consider a theory of streaming in relation to archives is both productive and generative in that it becomes possible to examine both the myth and the ritual which are themselves responses to a demand for meaning.

Drawing again from Auge to consider how archives might be approached to address contemporary problems without returning or indeed revising, I would like to invoke Edgar Allan Poe's, *The Purloined letter* (1910). In Poe's, *the Purloined Letter*, the misplacement of the letter is seen as an episode, a stage in the character's life which like other signifying stages (an examination, a new job, a new relationship) depends largely on other people other than ourselves. The character is thus fixed in a web of collective and social obligations. A reasonable critique in any archival work could be to ask the question "How could our predecessors not have seen or taken into account a fact that was right before their eyes?" However this also opens up some further puzzling questions:

- is there an assumption that a systematic review of the past can resolve such problematics?
- what might blind us to the 'obvious'?
- should we look backwards towards resolutions or forwards into new beginnings? is it possible to do both?
- can we ever see the ground we are standing upon until we have moved?
- does the very framing of *The Purloined Letter*, as mystery narrative, limit or determine the possibilities that may emerge?

There is perhaps an implicit assumption³ that meanings cannot be constructed without a past.

(Auge, 2014, p16) Poe's question to us is perhaps just this - Is a systematic review of the past necessary to resolve the situation or to be able to move on? The very purloining of the letter gestures towards the problematics that are involved in seeking any single explanations, or of invoking any single author as cause, origin or agent. The puzzle draws us to those aspects of our experience that traditionally fall outside of history and which necessarily evade determination e.g. intuition, creative endeavours, encounters with others.

Ritual is then invoked as a specific episode as the letter is purloined. The notion of ritual can relate to specific events that are not expected as well as recurrent events. The purloined letter in effect relates to both senses of ritual in that it is a specific and isolated episode in the narrative but one which is recurrent in the lives of others as well. We are all familiar with the process of loss in some shape and form yet a circular recognition refuses any opening towards an other, the radically new and the uniqueness of experience.

Archives lend themselves well to analogies of ritual in that:

- they are rooted in the past
- they are set apart temporally and spatially from everyday life
- they often follow a predetermined sequential order or follows rules
- there are specific gestures, words and terms follow a code from archive to archive

³ Marc Auge makes the point more fully In The Future chapter 2 but for the purposes of Implicit in the sense that most religions and western philosophies could uphold the significance of the past in understanding both our present and our futures.

- there is an intimate sharing of language and references which create forms of momentary identity e.g. In the Co-op archives the term “co-operator” is frequently used within and between various documents

Auge points to a different dimension to ritual in that it also plays a part in bringing something new into existence. Rituals, if they are to function have both a past dimension and a future orientation in that they mark new beginnings. They usher in a beginning rather than ‘novelty’ (the latter being understood as the radically new. To re-read, to read again is to live through a new beginning. A lesson from the Purloined Letter is perhaps that the new can be both succession and rupture; completion and beginning. The archives may enable a different conception of the future by drawing attention, as Poe’s Purloined Letter did, to the rituals that are at work when we encounter loss, ambiguity and contradictions.

Archives encourage a preoccupation with things in themselves when perhaps there might be potential to try and understand relational processes and the work of ritual - our own rituals when we encounter its materials. In archival work concepts of identity and representation seem obvious and important and yet resonance, difference and diversity are at work. How we might bring about newness in established knowledge rather than trying to represent truth and articulate identity, seems important. Deleuze and Guattari understand the paradoxes of time and paradoxical relations in exploring what survives, what lives on despite...., what repeats. The past is never left behind for Deleuze and Guattari so *“it neither ages nor ages us nor passes away for a better future”* Instead it is *“re-assembled in a way that resists its identification with general movements of fading and amplification”*. (Bell and Colebrook 2009, p157)

R. I. P. [Resting in the pause]

Catherine Malabou (2014) warns us “*not to totalise the possible*” and yet is this an ideological aim for many archives? When Auge drew a distinction between ‘world’ and ‘site’, I think he was doing so in ways that recognised the limitations of anthropology as locatable site, static identities and clear representations. His shift in thinking about the changing nature of metaphor and ritual in terms of upstream and downstream acknowledge the paradoxes of time and the relationally that is inevitable involved. Gabriel Markus refers to a *field of sense* (2017) whereby there can be no field of sense that has all fields of sense otherwise there would be sets of principles governing everything that exists. “*The future is open or it is nothing*” (ibid)

So what can be done in these new landscapes? “*Ever tried. Ever failed. No Matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.*” (Samuel Beckett 1983)

A knowledge gained from failure is capable of giving deeper meanings about our lives and what we are doing. If archives can teach us anything, they are capable of enabling us to imagine better, to improve our future selves, to alter our frames of mind and to reflect differently on experience. Understanding the theory building drives behind different conceptions is perhaps a start. Reconsidering relations between different kinds of knowing as well as recognising our myth building and rituals offers some potential in asking what separates us? and what connects? When we look into archives, what do we refuse to know? what might we never know unless we shift our frames of thinking? If we reject the notion of building up knowledge progressively and consider the experiential and experimental possibilities instead, then perhaps archives can help us understand what we might still yet learn from transcendental approaches whilst avoiding the aspirational clamber to unitary meanings. A kind of ‘grounding affect’ which seeks to act as a lightning rod that can make sense and silence strike in the archive.

Reflexivity plays a part in such a manifesto. It is an ethical and political project which enables us to better understand the knowledge we create. Its ethos requires us to question prevailing modes of thought and intervene with hegemonic discourses as different levels are opened up for exploration and examination. In making time to enable researchers to explore the relevance of their own engagements, the movement of thought in the research process itself and the inevitable complexities of language and authority, a curious thing happens - a space opens that invites you to enter and where the Same and the Other co-exist in a new and elusive way.

Archives are often associated with traditional education. They are not places where most of us go or think of going. This article has attempted to engage with some fresh thinking and engagement with what an archive is, what it might be, where it might go and what it might do. It has sought to consider archives as a zone, a place between layers, between life itself and death.

Remembering isn't always the same as what you have witnessed (Barnes 2012, p3.)

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